

**PROGRAM ADMINISTRATOR FOR A NATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL
LABORATORY ACCREDITATION PROGRAM
COOPERATIVE AGREEMENT**

General Information

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| Announcement Type: | Initial Announcement |
| Funding Instrument Type: | CA |
| Funding Opportunity Number: | EPA-ORD-25357 |
| Posted Date: | October 19, 2004 |
| Original Due Date for Applications: | To be considered timely, initial proposals must be received by 3:00 p.m. local (i.e., Las Vegas) time on December 20, 2004 from the U.S. Postal Service or other commercial delivery service. |
| Current Due Date for Applications: | To be considered timely, initial proposals must be received by 3:00 p.m. local (i.e., Las Vegas) time on December 20, 2004 from the U.S. Postal Service or other commercial delivery service. |
| Archive Date: | (To be completed by GAD) |
| Category of Funding Activity: | Environment |
| Expected Number of Awards: | 1 |
| Estimated Total Program Funding: | \$700,000 |
| Award Ceiling: | \$700,000 |
| Award Floor: | \$200,000 |
| CFDA Number: | 66.510 ORD Surveys, Studies, Investigations and Special Purpose Grants |
| Cost Sharing or Matching Requirement: | None |

Eligible Applicants

Assistance awards under CFDA 66.510 are available to each State, territory and possession, and Tribal nation of the U.S., including the District of Columbia, for public and private State universities and colleges, hospitals, laboratories, State and local government departments, other public or private nonprofit institutions, and in some cases, individuals who have demonstrated unusually high scientific ability.

Federal Agency Name

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Office of Research and Development, National Exposure Research Division, Environmental Sciences Division
Attn: Kathie Stephens-Landers
US Environmental Protection Agency

National Exposure Research Laboratory
944 E. Harmon Ave.
Las Vegas, NV 89119

Description

The U. S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is offering financial assistance to a technically qualified, eligible organization interested in being the Program Administrator for a national environmental laboratory accreditation system. For approximately nine years, a joint federal, state, and private sector effort has been underway to establish a uniform national environmental laboratory accreditation program. (NOTE: Accreditation is defined here as the process by which a governmental body or organization evaluates and recognizes a laboratory as meeting certain predetermined qualifications or standards.) The program consists of a federal-state partnership called the National Environmental Laboratory Accreditation Conference (NELAC), which serves as a means for member organizations to adopt consistent standards for laboratory accreditation and program operation in addition to a program administrative function that is currently performed by the EPA. While the EPA has been temporarily performing the duties of program administrator (e.g., accrediting the NELAC Accrediting Authorities) and funding the operation of the program (e.g., NELAC meetings), the program has now reached the point where its long-term success requires that it become self-sufficient. As part of its effort to continue to assist the laboratory community in achieving the goal of having a single national environmental laboratory program, the Agency is offering to assist an appropriate organization in the transition to self-sufficiency.

Agency Contact Person for Electronic Access Problem

Walter Stutts, Phone: 513/569-7487 Email: stutts.water@epa.gov

Link to Full Announcement (Note: Leave blank. GAD will complete.)

I. Funding Opportunity Description

Title of Assistance Opportunity:

Program Administrator for a National Environmental Laboratory Accreditation Program Cooperative Agreement

Background:

The U. S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is offering financial assistance to a technically qualified, eligible organization interested in being the Program Administrator for a national environmental laboratory accreditation system. For approximately nine years, a joint federal, state, and private sector effort has been underway to establish a uniform national environmental laboratory accreditation program. (NOTE: Accreditation is defined here as the process by which a governmental body or organization evaluates and recognizes a laboratory as meeting certain predetermined qualifications or standards.) The program consists of a federal-state partnership called the National Environmental Laboratory Accreditation Conference (NELAC), which serves as a means for member organizations to adopt consistent standards for laboratory accreditation and program operation in addition to a program administrative function that is currently performed by the EPA. While the EPA has been temporarily performing the duties of program administrator (e.g., accrediting the NELAC Accrediting Authorities) and funding the operation of the program (e.g., NELAC meetings), the program has now reached the point where its long-term success requires that it become self-sufficient. As part of its effort to continue to assist the laboratory community in achieving the goal of having a single national environmental laboratory program, the Agency is offering to assist an appropriate organization in the transition to self-sufficiency.

Funding Priorities/Focus:

EPA expects to award financial assistance under this solicitation to support the efforts of an eligible organization to become the Program Administrator for a national environmental laboratory accreditation system. The primary areas of focus will be:

- a. development and implementation of a strategy and implementation plan for the long-term operation and sustainability of the NELAC national environmental laboratory accreditation system. This includes, but is not limited to:
 - marketing and outreach to existing and future members for continued consistency and growth,
 - assessments of Accrediting Authorities per the NELAC Standards, and
 - assessments of Proficiency Testing Oversight Bodies / Proficiency Testing Provider Accreditors (PTOBs/PTPAs) in conjunction with the Proficiency Testing (PT) Board; and
- data management to assure the production of data that is of known and documented quality.

EPA is soliciting initial proposals from technically qualified, interested, and eligible

organizations that are interested in program administration for laboratory accreditation.

GPRA Goals, Objectives:

The specific Government Performance Results Act (GPRA) Goals, Objectives and Sub-objectives that relate to this RFIP include:

GPRA Goal: 4.0 Healthy Communities and Ecosystems
Objective(s): 4.5 Enhance Science and Research
Sub-objective(s): 4.5.2 Conduct Relevant Research

Statutory Authority for Award of Assistance: This research is authorized under §8001 of the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA), §104 of the Clean Water Act (CWA), §1442 of the Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA), §10 of the Toxic Substances Control Act (TSCA), or §103 of the Clean Air Act (CAA).

II. Award Information

Amount and Range of Individual Award: \$200,000 per year for the first two years; \$150,000 third year; \$100,000 fourth year; \$50,000 fifth year (Total - \$700,000)

Number of Awards: 1 award

Funding: The EPA is expected to fund this award over a period of 5 years. Funding of the first year of the award is expected to be at \$200,000 total. Additional funding of \$200,000 the second year, \$150,000 the third year, \$100,000 the fourth year, and \$50,000 the fifth year will be contingent upon availability of funds and satisfactory progress by the selected recipient.

Project Period: March 2005 to March 2010

Supplemental Applications: Applications for supplemental awards of existing EPA assistance agreements will not be eligible to compete for this assistance opportunity.

Type of Award: The Agency anticipates the award of a cooperative agreement.

Anticipated Federal Involvement:

EPA and the Project Officer for this assistance agreement anticipate substantial involvement in the implementation of the program as follows:

1. Provide technical input on existing operations of the NELAC program;
2. Provide technical assistance for initial assessments; and
3. Provide technical input on strategy and implementation plan for the long-term operation and sustainability of the NELAC national environmental laboratory accreditation system.

III. Eligibility Information

Eligible Applicants: Assistance awards under CFDA 66.510 are available to: States, territories and possessions, and Tribal nations of the U.S., including the District of Columbia, public and private State universities and colleges, not-for-profit hospitals and laboratories, State and local government departments, other public or private nonprofit institutions, and in some cases, individuals who have demonstrated unusually high scientific ability.

Cost Sharing Requirements: None.

Other Eligibility Criteria:

Eligible nonprofit organizations include any organizations that meet the definition of nonprofit in OMB Circular A-122. However, nonprofit organizations described in Section 501(c)(4) of the Internal Revenue Code that engage in lobbying activities as defined in Section 3 of the Lobbying Disclosure Act of 1995 are not eligible to apply. Universities and educational institutions must be subject to OMB Circular A-21.

Groups of two or more eligible applicants may choose to form a coalition and submit a single application for this assistance agreement. Coalitions must identify which eligible organization will be the recipient of the assistance agreement, and which eligible organizations(s) will be subawardees of the recipient. Sub awards must be consistent with the definition of that term in 40 CFR 30.2(ff). The recipient must administer the assistance agreement, is accountable to EPA for proper expenditure of the funds, and will be the point of contact for the coalition. As provided in 40 CFR 30.2(gg), sub recipients are accountable to the recipient for proper use of EPA funding.

Coalitions may not include for profit organizations that will provide services or products to the successful applicant. For profit organizations are not eligible for sub awards. Any contracts for services or products funded with EPA financial assistance must be awarded under the competitive procurement procedures of 40 CFR Part 30. The regulations also contain limitations on consultant compensation. Applicants are not required to identify contractors or consultants in the proposal. Moreover, the fact a successful applicant has named a specific contractor or consultant in the proposal EPA approves does not relieve it of its obligations to comply with competitive procurement requirements or consultant compensation limitations.

Applications will be reviewed for eligibility during the Administrative Review (see Section V). Initial proposals from ineligible applicants will be returned without further review.

IV. Application and Submission Information

Address to Request Application Package: Kathie Stephens-Landers, US Environmental Protection Agency, National Exposure Research Laboratory, 944 E. Harmon Ave., Las Vegas, NV 89119. Application information is also available from the EPA/ORD/NERL website at <http://www.epa.gov/nerl/> under the heading Assistance Opportunities. This document, and any subsequent amendments, constitutes the entire Request for Initial Proposal.

Content and Form of Application Submission: At a minimum, the initial proposal shall consist of the following items:

1. A cover sheet that identifies the RFIP title and identification number (EPA-ORD-25357), name and address of applicant, point of contact, telephone number, e-mail address for the applicant, applicant's DUNS number (see Section VIII), and the date of the submission.
2. Technical proposal that discusses the approach to accomplishing the goals stated under Funding Priorities/Focus, the capabilities (in terms of personnel and facilities) of the applicant to complete the program, the expected results from this program, how the program will advance and stimulate the public need, and how the results will be made available to the public and government. In developing the technical proposal, the applicant should focus on the evaluation criteria set forth in Section V and structure the proposal to address each of the criteria in the order listed.

The page limitation of the technical proposal is 15 double sided pages with a minimum font size of 12, single-spaced. This page limitation should include all text, tables, figures, references, attachments, and appendices. In addition, a 2-page summary of the primary lead and any other key personnel identified in the proposal should also be provided.

3. A budget estimate for the project that is broken down into direct labor, fringe benefits, equipment, travel, other direct costs and overhead with summaries for each year and the total for the entire project. Indicate proposed cost sharing, as well.
4. A Quality Assurance Project Plan (QAPP) that outlines the steps that will be taken to adequately address data management issues within the program. (See the Agency's Quality Assurance website for guidance at: http://www.epa.gov/quality/qa_docs.html)

Initial proposals should be submitted in the original with 3 copies and should be double-sided.

Submission Date, Time, and Location: Because of security concerns, applications cannot be personally delivered. They must be sent through regular mail, express mail, or

a major courier.

The following address must be used for regular mail, express mail, and couriers:

Kathie Stephens-Landers
US Environmental Protection Agency
National Exposure Research Laboratory
944 E. Harmon Ave.
Las Vegas, NV 89119

To be considered timely, initial proposals must be received by 3:00 p.m. local (i.e., Las Vegas) time on December 20, 2004 from the U.S. Postal Service or a major courier. Proposals should be sent to the attention of Kathie Stephens-Landers. Initial proposals received after the deadline will not be considered and will be returned to the submitter.

Intergovernmental Review: This assistance opportunity is subject to Executive Order 12372, "Intergovernmental Review of Federal Programs." Applicants should contact their State's Single Point of Contact (SPOC) to find out how to comply with the State's process. The names and addresses of the SPOC's are listed in the Office of Management and Budget's home page at: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/grants/spoc.html>.

Funding Restrictions: The EPA is expected to fund this award over a period of 5 years. Funding of the first year of the award is expected to be at \$200,000 total. Additional funding of \$200,000 the second year, \$150,000 the third year, \$100,000 the fourth year, and \$50,000 the fifth year will be contingent upon availability of funds and satisfactory progress by the selected recipient.

Amendments: Amendments will be posted on this website and the due date for initial proposals will be extended if deemed appropriate.

Other Submission Requirements: None.

V. Application Review Information

Criteria: The criteria used to evaluate proposals include:

Administrative Review: All initial proposals will be subject to an administrative review to ensure that they conform with the requirements of this RFIP. EPA may reject any applications that fail to conform substantially with the requirements of this RFIP.

Relevance Review: Initial proposals that are found administratively acceptable will be subjected to a review for relevancy to EPA's mission to support advancement of environmental science. Initial proposals may be rejected if they are found to lack relevance. Examples include:

1. Proposal is deficient technically with no chance for consideration.
2. Proposal fails to advance the objectives stated in the solicitation even if successfully performed.
3. Proposal fails to demonstrate a public purpose of support and stimulation; i.e., it implies the primary purpose is to provide direct support to the Federal government.

Technical Review: Initial proposals that are found administratively acceptable and relevant shall be reviewed for technical merit against the following criteria.

1. Adequacy of technical approach. (20%)
2. Strength of the qualifications and experience of the organization and key personnel for program operations. (20%)
3. Plan for sustaining the program, given the understanding that EPA's assistance will decrease over the course of a five year period and cease after a maximum period of five years. (NOTE: Although EPA is not requiring a mandatory cost share, your approach to obtaining additional funding to become self-sustaining in the future will be a factor in ranking applications. Applicants are encouraged to provide specific information regarding resources (cash/in-kind services) that they, or a project partner, would commit. EPA will consider the nature and firmness of these commitments as part of this ranking factor.) (20%)
4. Organization's proposed Quality Assurance Project Plan to assure data management issues within the program are adequately addressed. (20%)
5. Cost effectiveness of the proposed budget. (20%)

Other Factors: None

Review and Selection Process:

Evaluation Process: The administrative and relevancy reviews will be conducted by EPA personnel who are not a part of the technical review panel. The technical review panel might include EPA personnel and/or non-EPA consultants, either Federal employees or otherwise, who are able to demonstrate technical expertise and a lack of any conflict of interest.

Source Selection: EPA will make a selection of the applicant for award based upon the rankings of the technical review panel and the other factors discussed above. The Decision Official is an Office of Research and Development (ORD) manager who will determine which applicant should receive the award.

Full Application: The applicant selected for award will be requested to submit a full, detailed application in accordance with the guidance provided by EPA's Office of Grants and Debarment (<http://www.epa.gov/ogd/>). After receipt of the full application, EPA may negotiate changes to the proposal with the selected applicant. For example, EPA

will discuss significant comments received from the technical reviewers, aspects of the budget that may be questionable, the proposed terms and conditions for the agreement, and the nature and extent of EPA collaboration.

Rejection Factors: Applications may be rejected because they fail to comply with the administrative requirements of the RFIP, they are found to lack relevancy, they are judged technically unacceptable, or they are not deemed suitable for award due to other factors (if identified). EPA reserves the right to reject all proposals or applications and make no awards.

Disputes: Disputes will be resolved pursuant to the process described in 40 CFR 30.63 and Part 31, subpart F.

Anticipated Announcement and Award Dates: The anticipated award date is March 31, 2004.

VI. Award Administration Information

Award Notices: Notice of award will be made in writing by an official in the EPA Grants Administration Division. Preliminary selection by the Decision Official in the Office of Research and Development does not guarantee an award will be made. Applicants are cautioned that only a grants officer can bind the Government to the expenditure of funds. No commitment on the part of EPA should be inferred from technical or budgetary discussions with an EPA Program Official. The primary lead or organization that makes financial or personnel commitments in the absence of a grant or cooperative agreement signed by the EPA Grants Award Official does so at their own risk.

EPA will promptly notify in writing via email those applicants whose initial proposal is rejected. An unsuccessful applicant may request a debriefing to better understand the evaluated strengths and weaknesses of its proposal and the reason for rejection if other than technical merit.

Administrative and National Policy Requirements: **Regulations and OMB Coverage:**

Grants and agreements with institutions of higher education, hospitals, and other non-profit organizations are subject to 40 CFR Parts 30 and 40 and OMB Circular A-122 for non-profits and A-21 for institutions of higher learning.

Grants and agreements with state, local, and tribal governments are subject to 40 CFR Parts 31 and 40 and OMB Circular A-87.

Programmatic Terms and Conditions: Terms and conditions will be negotiated with the selected recipient covering the following requirements:

The nature and extent of collaboration between EPA and the recipient.

Reporting:

Quarterly Progress Reports: The selected recipient will be required to submit quarterly progress reports to the EPA Project Officer by the following dates in each fiscal quarter: March 10th; June 10th; September 10th; and December 10th. The first report will be due on the second fiscal quarter date following the date of award. Thereafter, a report will be due on each successive date for the life of the project. The quarterly progress reports will include brief statements covering work status, work progress, difficulties encountered, actions taken, and planned activities for the next quarter. Each report shall include a summary of expenditures and any changes of key personnel concerned with the project, as well.

Draft Final Report: The recipient agrees to submit a draft final report to the EPA Project Officer for comment at least 90 days prior to the end of the approved project period. The recipient shall prepare the final project report in accordance with the EPA Project Officer's instructions and submit the final project report within 90 days after the end of the project period.

Final Report: The selected recipient will be required to submit a final report within 90 calendar days of the completion of the period of performance.

Final Report Format: Final reports and summary submissions will be in both hard copy form and in electronic format. The CD supplied by the recipient should be produced with an Agency standard software package and the file must be in ASCII (American Standard Code for Information Interchange). All reports delivered to EPA must be Year 2000 compliant (see EPAAR 1552.211-79).

The recipient agrees to submit the final report to the EPA Project Officer in accordance with 40 CFR 40.160-5 and the "Handbook for Preparing Office of Research and Development Reports", 8/95, as revised and updated at the time of report preparation. The draft report is due ninety days prior to the end of the project period, and the final report is due ninety days after the end of the project period. A final technical report is required in accordance with 40 CFR 40.160-5.

VII. Agency Contact

The primary agency contact for this RFIP is Kathie Stephens-Landers at:

US Environmental Protection Agency

National Exposure Research Laboratory
944 E. Harmon Ave.
Las Vegas, NV 89119

Telephone: 702-798-2134
E-mail: stephens-landers.kathie@epa.gov

If unable to reach Ms. Stephens-Landers, contact Mr. Walt Stutts at:

Telephone: 513/569-7487
Telefax: 513/569-7424
E-mail: stutts.walter@epa.gov

VIII. Other Information

Questions: Questions should be submitted in writing by December 3, 2004. Do not attempt to seek information regarding this RFIP from any source other than those identified in Section VII as the information provided may be erroneous. Questions that are considered significant will be answered via an amendment to this RFIP.

Confidential Information: Clearly mark information considered to be confidential. EPA will make final confidentially decisions in accordance with Agency regulations at 40 CFR, Part 2, Subpart B. As noted above, initial proposals might be provided to one or more non-EPA consultants for review. All reviewers will be required to sign confidentiality agreements certifying that they will keep all deliberations confidential, and they will not copy any portions of any material provided by EPA for review, and they will return all material to EPA upon request. If you are unwilling to allow non-EPA consultants to review your proposal, please advise us of your decision in a cover letter to your proposal.

DUNS Number: Grant applicants are required to provide a Dun and Bradstreet (D&B) Data Universal Numbering System (DUNS) number when applying for Federal grants or cooperative agreements. OMB has determined that there is a need for improved statistical reporting of Federal grants and cooperative agreements. Use of the DUNS number government-wide will provide a means to identify entities receiving those awards and their business relationships. The identifier will be used for tracking purposes, and to validate address and point of contact information.

A DUNS number will be required whether an applicant is submitting a paper application or using the government-wide electronic portal (Grants.gov). The DUNS number will supplement other identifiers required by statute or regulation, such as tax identification numbers. Organizations can receive a DUNS number in one day, at no cost, by calling the dedicated toll-free DUNS Number request line at 1-866-705- 5711. Individuals who

would personally receive a grant or cooperative agreement award from the Federal government apart from any business or non-profit organization they may operate are exempt from this requirement. The website where an organization can obtain a DUNS number is: <http://www.dnb.com>. This takes 30 business days and there is no cost unless the organization requests expedited (1-day) processing, which includes a fee of \$40.